

[L.A. Times](#)

The Justice Department said Tuesday it is reviewing banks for possible antitrust violations in decisions to charge fees for debit card use.

The department is "reviewing the statements and actions by banks and their trade associations regarding possible increases in consumer fees for using debit cards," Assistant Atty. Gen. Ronald Weich wrote to Rep. Peter Welch (D-Vt.).

"Please be assured that if it finds that individuals, banks or other parties may have violated the antitrust laws, the Department will take appropriate action," Weich said in the letter, which was released by Welch.

Following a flurry of announcements last month of possible debit card fees, Welch asked Atty. Gen. Eric Holder to investigate whether banks and trade associations engaged in price signaling or collusion in reaction to new federal limits on the amount that large financial institutions can charge retailers for processing debit card transactions.

Because of the limits, which took effect Oct. 1, Wells Fargo & Co. and JPMorgan Chase & Co. began testing debit card fees for their customers in some states. And Bank of America said it would begin charging some customers a \$5 monthly fee for debit card use.

All have since abandoned those plans amid outrage from consumers and politicians.

"While big banks like Bank of America beat a hasty retreat on their debit card fee strategies, I have no doubt that they will continue their quest to dig deeper into the pockets of struggling consumers," said Welch, who helped lead the push to include the debit fee limits in last year's overhaul of financial regulations. "As they consider their next move, they should be aware that there is a cop actively on the beat."

